

The House of Representatives released its initial version of the state budget yesterday afternoon. If you have looked at TJJD's funding, or heard about it, you will know that the approach taken with our budget was very different than in past sessions. Rather than specify how the dollars will be spent, it provides a total amount, and leaves it to the Legislature to examine the challenges we face and set a vision that addresses those challenges. It also identifies specific policy questions that should be considered.

There are a few things we should all keep in mind in trying to understand what this means, and what the next few months will bring. I take it as a positive sign that although the uses of funding are not specified, the total amount of funding is very close to our base request. The House budget does not eliminate TJJD, or require us to close facilities, or specify anything about how much funding will be used in what areas. What it does is accelerate a conversation that is already underway, and was already going to be a driving force this session, about how to give youth in the system the greatest chance of success.

The answer to that question may require us as an agency to make some changes, but the House's budget is just the first step in a long process that will chart the course of juvenile justice in Texas. The Senate will present its initial version of the budget in a week or two, and it may be very similar or very different than what the House laid out. There will be many hearings, meetings, and conversations over the next four months, and we will be active participants in that process. I hope you all will see this session as I do, as an opportunity to grab hold of the best of who we are, and what we do, and then move us to the next level.

David